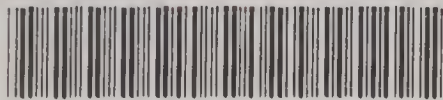


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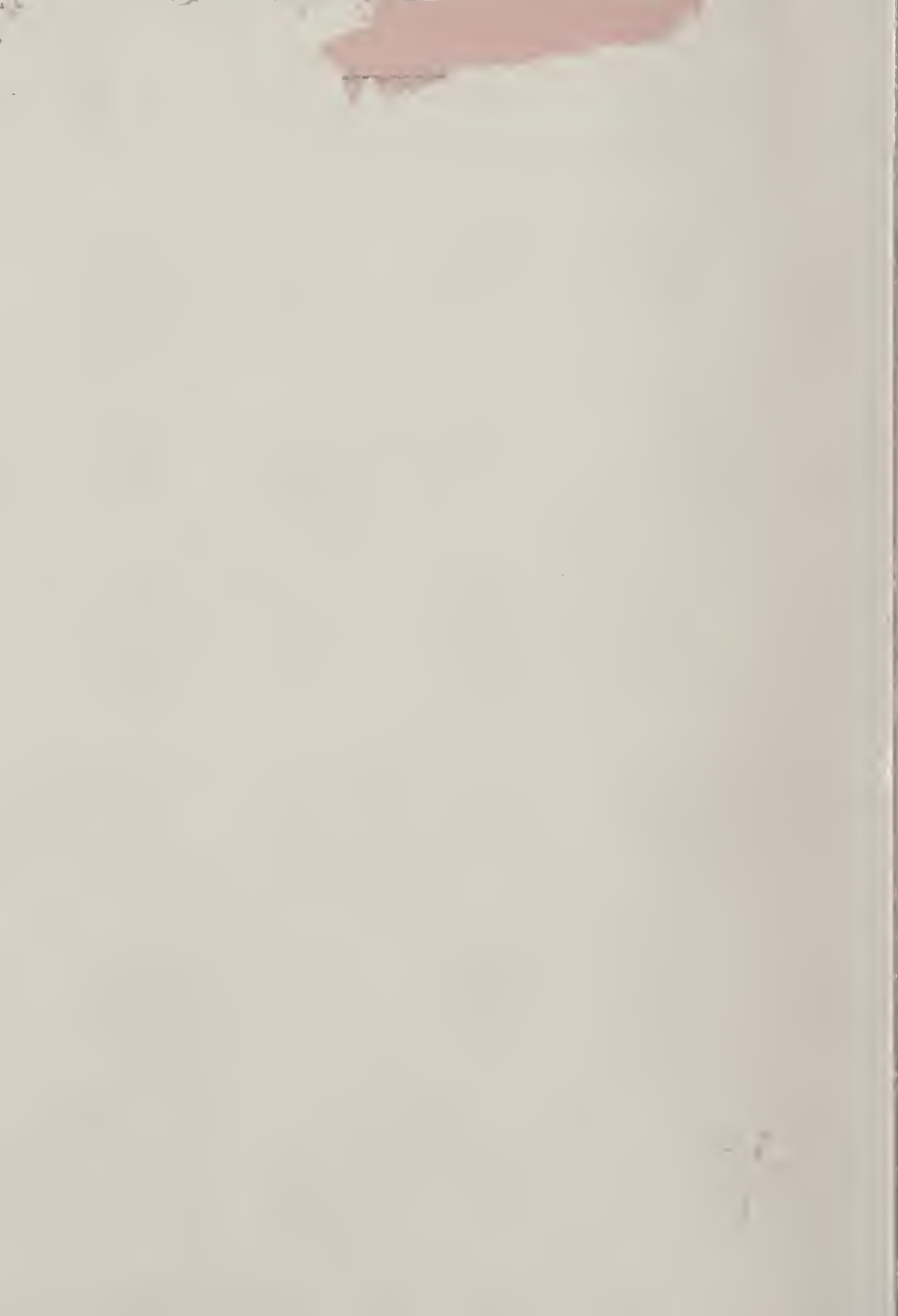
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THE

BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA

BY

J. J. GRINDALL, OF BALTIMORE.

[From The United Service Review.]

REPUBLISHED BY THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF
MILITARY HISTORIANS AND
ORIGINATED BY

J. F. MILLER, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE

ASSOCIATION

SURVIVORS OF THE MEXICAN WAR.

BALTIMORE:

PRESS OF ISAAC FRIEDENWALD

No. 103 W. Fayette St.

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THE BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA.

The stars are bright o'er Buena Vista's plain,
And night once more asserts her silent reign.
By Angostura's pass the Tigre flows,
And o'er its waves the whispering south wind blows.
The dark green hills, o'erspread as by a pall,
Seem mourning, still, the conquering Aztecs' fall,
Whose shades may haunt the sombre vales below,
Where waving palm and towering cacti grow.
Oh, fair the land where Montezuma reigned
O'er fields unravished, temples unprofaned !
Where nut-brown maids to Aztec music danced,
And hoary priests with solemn step advanced !
Where Aztec lovers sought the evening bower,
And Aztec warriors wheeled in ranks of power !
Where be their temples now ?—their sacred groves ?
Their warriors' trophies and their maidens' loves ?
The moss-mantled arch, crumbling stone by stone,
Where the raven croaks and the night-winds moan,
An altar sunk down and o'ergrown with weeds,
Where the horned toad by the serpent feeds,
And a broken tomb in the trackless waste,

With its shaft thrown down, and the name defaced,
 Are all that is now of their story left
 Since the war-bolt of Spain from the Antilles swept
 But lo! from the North the avenger's at hand,
 With far-flashing sword and red-gleaming brand,
 And to-morrow ye may, O unsepulchred ghosts,
 Exult o'er the fate of the spoiler's hosts!

Such is the night; but sounds and scenes disclose,
 Though nature wills, that man seeks not repose.
 On either hand along the high plateau
 Red fires are blazing; men move to and fro.
 Stern-visaged men, with sabre, gun, and plume,
 Clank as they stride, and hurry through the gloom.
 No listless crowds around the watch-fires prate
 Of former carnage, or of comrade's fate;
 Nor dozing sentinels, in dreams profound,
 Forget to pace their solitary round;
 But thoughts of strife surcharge each busy brain,
 And life, concentric, throbs through every vein!
 Rank, file, and column quickly cleave the night,
 Their serried bayonets flashing fitful light!
 The pawing steed, caparisoned for war,
 Stamps the green earth and neighs his challenge far!
 While grim artillerists hold hard their breath,
 Prepare the match, and point their tubes of death.
 The harsh drum rattles, and the clarion's cry
 Returns weird echoes from the midnight sky.
 Columbia's flag o'er parapet and mound
 Salutes her sons on this their chosen ground,—

Chosen for life or death, for weal or woe,
Where they must perish, or repulse the foe !

* * * * * * * * *

Night's vapory mantle melting now away,
The brightening East reveals the glowing day,
Bathing in roseate hues the embattled plain,
So soon to blossom o'er the hapless slain !
The deep battalion and extended line,
With burnished arms in lengthened glory shine !
While prancing squadrons in impatient ranks
With naked blades are hovering on the flanks,
And deep-mouthed guns, along each high redoubt,
In grim repose are peering darkly out,
Where high above the adverse banners play
In fitful dalliance with the morning's ray.—
But higher still the vulture soars at rest,
And scents from far the coming carnage feast !

* * * * * * * * *

Hark to yon battery pealing aloud
Neath the white wreathing lines of that sulphury
cloud !

On the left Lombardina's battalions surge on,
As the cloud-billows rush in the van of the storm,
While Vallamil's columns, charging in mass,
Are confronted by Washington's guns in the pass.

* * * * * * * * *

Hark to the cry of the wounded and dying,
As the Mexican right o'er the plateau is flying !
And hark to the voices of Sherman and Lane,
As they tread, in pursuit, on the face of the slain !
But the flood-tide of havoc is now sweeping back,

And the late vanquished bar the victor's red track,
 Where to the right, the hot battle converging,
 The hosts of the foe, reunited, are surging.
 "Ho!—Forward, McKee!—from your distant post!
 Wheel, Sherman!—quick! else the day is lost!
 And charge ye both, with the gallant Bissell,
 With Gorman and Bragg, O'Brien and Yell!"
 'Tis done! And as waves are repulsed by the rock,
 So they reel back, and sink down in the shock!

But far on the verge of the left and rear
 The haze of the conflict still darkens the air;
 From the sloping shelves of the mountains brown
 The cohorts of Miñon are pouring down,
 While nearer the right, and along the steep,
 The lancers of Torrejon fiercely sweep!
 Red with the blood of Gorman and Lane,
 Transpiercing the living and trampling the slain,
 They scour the field like a tornado's breath,
 Exulting in slaughter, havoc, and death!
 Nothing avails the unequal stand
 At intervals made by some desperate band;
 Nothing the flash—nothing the stroke,
 As they turn again, and again are broke,
 Or stand in their blood, like tigers at bay,
 Madly resisting the fate of the day!

But the sound of clattering squadrons is nigh,
 Where yon column of dust ascends to the sky,
 And, nearer and clearer, the bugle and drum
 Are speaking of hope and triumph to come,

As now full in front of the scourgers they wheel,
With foam-covered flanks and unscabbarded steel!

Not an instant's pause, but with bound and cry,
Revolvers emptied and blades on high,
They fall on the foe with concussion as loud
And lightning as keen as the bolt from the cloud!
See!—see through the rents in the dusky pall,
The glimmering sabres, circling, fall,
And rise again, all dripping with gore,
In many a hand that shall smite no more!
The deadly plunge and the pistol's flash,
The rolling steed and the lance's crash,
The rider unhorsed in the dust below,
Which reddens beneath the sanguine flow,
Are mingling there with such a voice
As makes the caverns of death rejoice!

Hark! the shouts of the victors swell
As the foe gives way before Marshall and Yell;
While Trail and Kilbourn, Wool, Sherman, and
Bragg,

In the hot pursuit not an instant flag!
Away! away! over ravine and plain,
Over shot-shivered fragment and heaps of the slain,
Speeds the wild rout to the mountain's gorge
On the besom-like tide of that furious charge!

But again to the plateau!—for life once more!
Where the strong reserves of the enemy pour;
Where the banner of Anahuac flouts the skies,
And the centre, o'erwhelmed, in confusion flies;

Where the guns of O'Brien are left to the foe,
 And their last defenders lie stark and low ;
 Where the gurgling life-blood of Hardin and Clay
 Stains the bruised grass where they fought and lay,
 And mingles its tides with the currents that ebb
 From the wounds of McKee, now stretched with the
 dead ;

Where, enthroned in the smoke of carnage dim,
 The demon of war chants his deadliest hymn,
 And laughs in his soul as the murderous storm,
 Like the waves of Phlegethon, is whirling on !

Lo ! who from the right, on a charger white,
 Stems the torrent and stays the flight ?
 What stern old man with sword on high,
 With hoary hair, but a piercing eye,
 And lowering brow all wrinkled by care,
 Springs to the front through the smoky air ?
 The foemen know by that milk-white steed,
 Of matchless mould and northern breed,
 They know by the shouts from each rallying band,
 And the re-forming lines, that Taylor's at hand !
 And following fast, of carnage full,
 Thunder the frowning columns of Wool !
 With banners all torn in the tempest of strife,
 And bayonets wet at the springs of life,
 With Davis' rifles and rolling drum,
 And caisson and cannon, they come—they come !
 Sherman is there, and his bugles aloud
 Are discoursing of death in the dun-colored cloud ;

But Bragg, in advance, and athirst for the blow,
Shouts to his troopers, and points to the foe !

Now !—now he unlimbers, grim and alone,
Where the dead lie heaped and the wounded groan,
Where destruction smiles o'er the bloody repast,
By the side of his chief, in the face of the blast !
A stunning roar, and a volume of light,
Such as *Ætna* pours on the bosom of night,
A rising cloud and a voice of wail,
Hollow and deep on the murmuring gale,
And, hewn through the foe, deep lanes of the dead
Proclaim too well how the bolt has sped !

But what though the mothers of Mexico mourn ?
Shall it stay the charge of their hope forlorn ?
Oh, never ! For there, with each back to the field,
'Twere glory to lie—dishonor to yield !

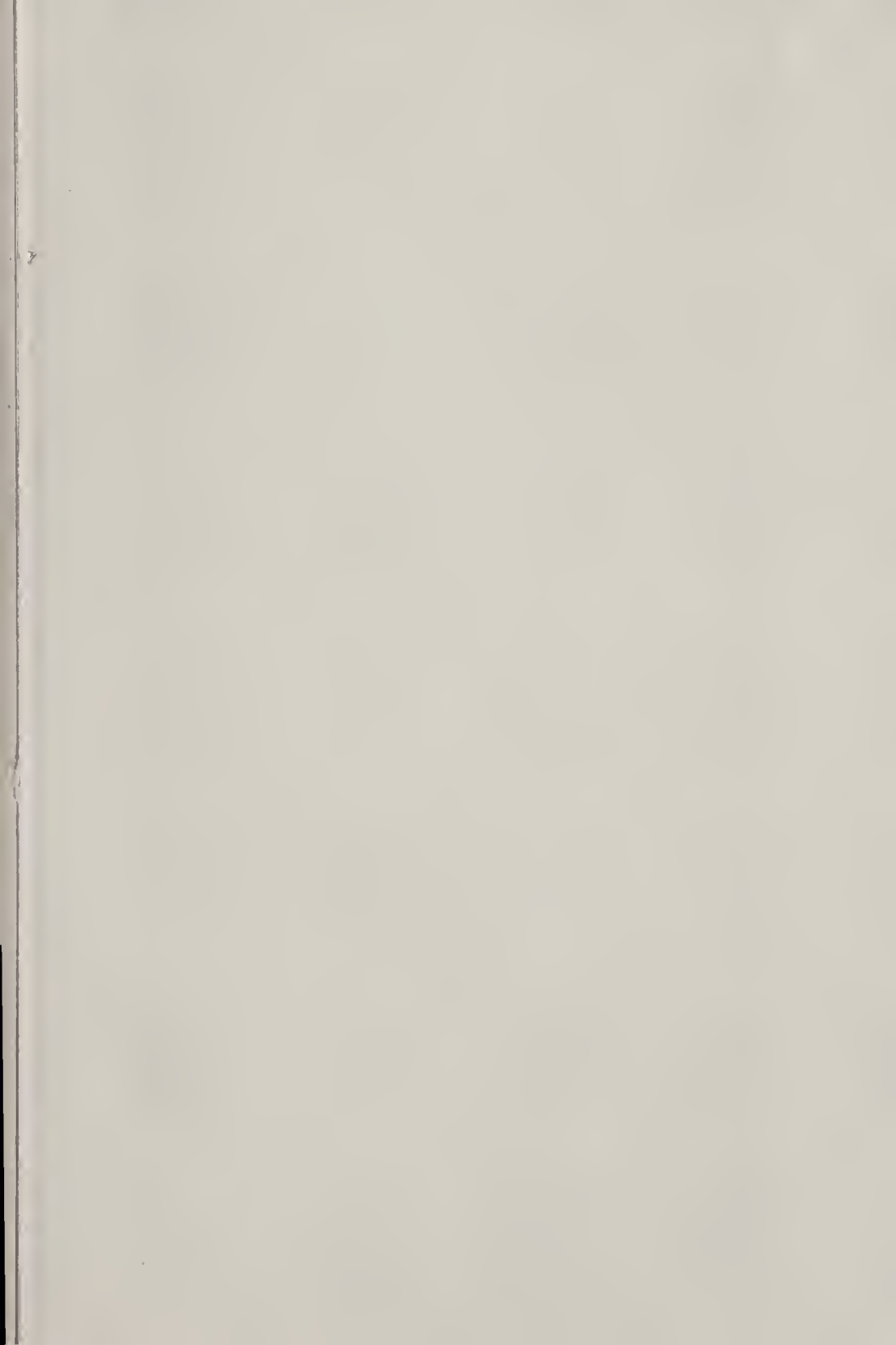
Scarce twenty rods, or less, are gained .
From where that iron deluge rained,
And the deep files closed, and faltering not,
Are shivered again by the merciless shot ;
And again that dread echo vibrates on the air,
Expansive and wild with the cry of despair !
But once again to the charge they spring,
And louder yet their clarions sing.
But, oh ! once more that awful sound
Smites the ear with its voice profound ;
And crushed and broken, and bleeding and torn,

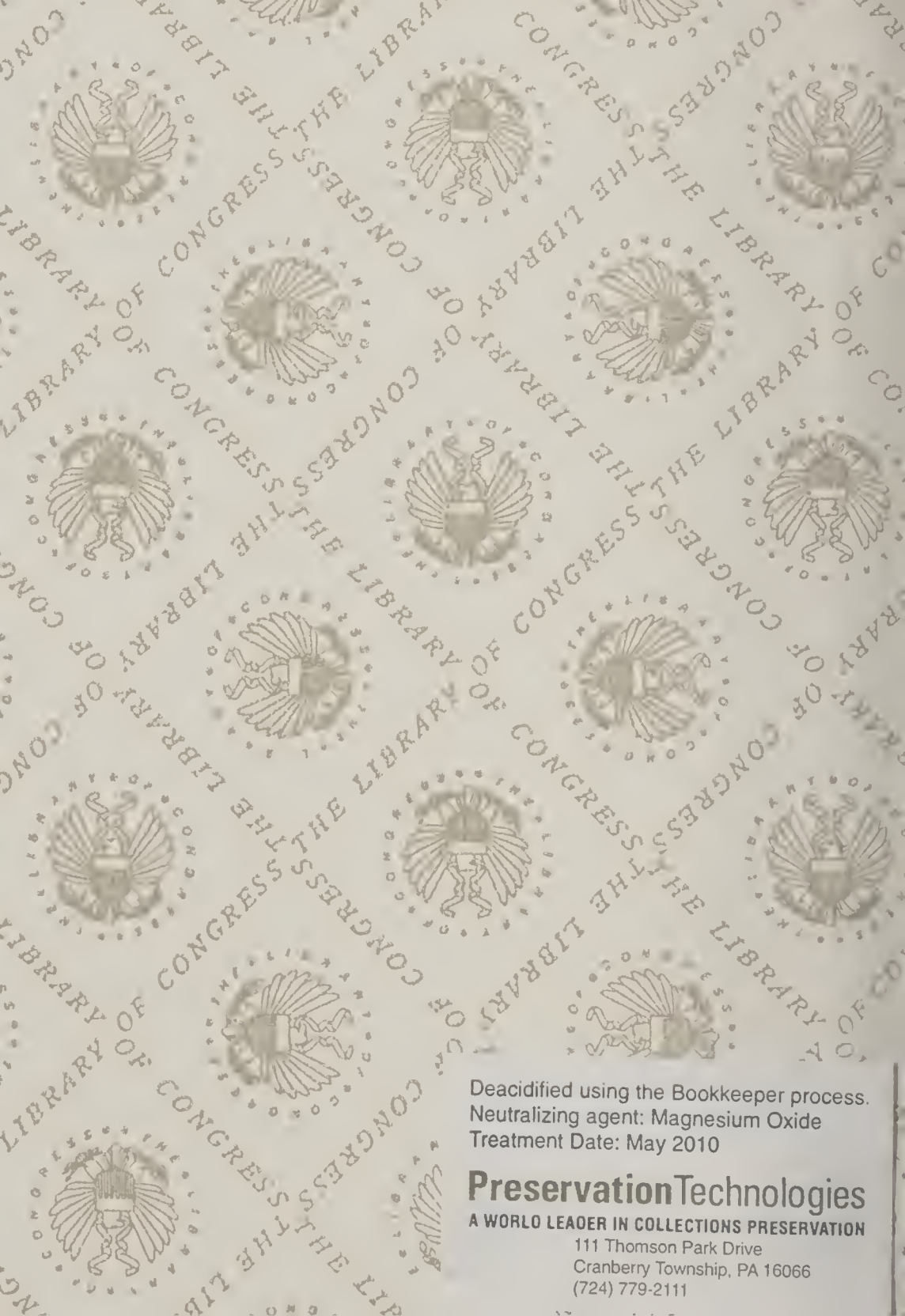
The wavering columns are backward borne,
Riven and scattered, disordered and pale,
In the pitiless storm of that iron hail !

With wild flashing eye and tangled mane
The riderless steed plunges, maddened by pain,
While with ball-riddled heart or cloven head
Thousands are left on their gory bed,
Where no dirge shall swell but the freezing howl
Of the hungry wolves when at night they prowl ;—
Where no plume but the vulture's wing may wave
O'er the hasty mound on the soldier's grave !

Baltimore, June 10, 1881.

J. J. GRINDALI.





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